

Topic: Cross-cultural Communication & Conversation Skills

Let's get started...

Before you begin discussing today's topic, take a few moments to play a game called "telephone". To play the game, one person must think of a secret or short story to share. Next, the person will whisper the secret to one student. This student will whisper the secret to the next student, the next student will whisper to the third student, etc. Continue this chain until the last person at the table has heard the secret. The last person should tell the group what he/she heard.

Did the last person in the group get the same message as the first person?

If not, how did the message change? Why do you think the message changed?

New words and Idioms:

Feedback, active listening, first person (I), second person (you), third person (he/she/they), eye contact, inflection, paraphrase, body language, converse, (make) small talk, shoot the breeze, chew the fat, yak, chit-chat, gab, jabber, schmooze, smooth talker, full of bologna, full of hot air, wind bag, etc.

Background:

In polite conversation Americans tend to stand about an arm's length apart. A good conversation allows people to speak **and** to listen. If one person does all of the talking, the listeners may become bored. If a person only listens and does not respond, he or she may seem unfriendly or uninterested. To end a conversation, you can say: "Well, it was nice talking with you."

***Conversation tips for effective speaking:**

- Face your listener(s) and look at them.
- Make eye contact often.
- Watch your listeners' responses. Do they seem to understand what you are saying? Do they look confused? Do they look uninterested? Ask questions. Encourage them to respond, and wait for them to finish speaking before you start again.
- Don't speak too loudly.
 - If your listener frequently asks "what?" or leans forward to listen -- he or she probably cannot hear you.
 - If you speak too loudly, it will be intimidating.

***Conversation tips for effective listening:**

- Watch the speaker.
- Make eye contact often. (If this is uncomfortable for you, try looking at the speaker's eyebrows.) Americans may feel that if a listener is not watching he is not listening. Do not turn away while the person is talking.
- When the speaker pauses, give feedback -- interject small responses to what he has been saying. (Examples: Really? Is that so? Is that right? I didn't know that. That's interesting. I see. Oh my?)

- Be an active listener. To make sure that you understand, ask questions, or try to paraphrase what the speaker has said. (For example: "Do you mean that.....?")
- Do not interrupt (unless the person is speaking too fast or you don't understand.) If you do **not** understand, do not nod your head or say "yes." Instead, say, "Excuse me. I did not understand that. Could you please say it again more slowly?"
Or ask, "What do you mean when you say-----?"

*Citation unavailable



In pairs for 5 minutes, have a brief conversation:

Topics to avoid in casual conversation:

Religion, politics, sex, money, age. (Anything that might be too personal.)

General Topics for small talk:

Weather, sports, families, television programs, movies, music, books, leisure activities and hobbies, plans for the weekend, work.

With a partner, pick a subject from the general topics listed above. Take turns asking and answering questions. The first person should ask a question. The second person should respond to the question then ask a question of his or her own. The first person will answer that question, and then ask another, and so on. See if you can continue long enough for each person to ask and answer 5 questions about the topic.

Share the topic of your conversation with the group.

Discussion Questions:

In your home country:

- How close do people stand when they are talking?
- How does a listener show respect?
- How does a listener show that he or she is listening?
- Do people criticize others openly? Can people be honest in their answers to questions?
- Are conversations personal or general?
- Are there topics you do not discuss?
- What do people enjoy talking about?
- Are there any conversation tips you could give to someone who is visiting your home country?

How can you start a conversation in English? In your country?

What is the hardest thing about talking to Americans?

What tips could you give a newcomer to help him/her talk to Americans?

What tips could you give a visitor to your country help him/her talk to people?

Tell about an experience (good or bad) that you have had when talking in English.